

# THE GOG PROPHECY AND THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL

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THE MAIN PURPOSE of this study is to reexamine the relationship between the Gog Prophecy (Ezekiel 38–39) and the rest of the Book of Ezekiel, concentrating especially on the question of its authorship and its possible historical setting. The most recent contribution I have read regarding these chapters is that of Astour (1976), who asserts Ezekiel's authorship of this Prophecy. Astour's main arguments may be summed up as follows: (a) Although this Prophecy contains doublets and glosses which betray a subsequent elaboration, "the style and imagery of its basic parts are not different from those of the chapters which are generally accepted as genuine writings of Ezekiel" (p. 567); (b) The Prophecy "links quite naturally with the preceding chapters 36–37, of which it was intended to be the dramatic climax" (p. 567); (c) The basic conception of this Prophecy goes back to a Babylonian didactic poem known as the Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin (p. 572). Ezekiel, who must have had access to Babylonian literature, was acquainted with this myth and was inspired by it. The basic resemblance between this legend and the Gog Prophecy shows that Ezekiel "modernized the setting of his Babylonian model by introducing into his prophecy names of his time, or recent past . . ." (p. 572ff).

In the course of my reexamination of the manifold aspects of this Prophecy, I found myself more than ever concurring in the main with the view voiced by many scholars who claim—in various ways and with dif-

ferent shifts of emphasis (see below)—that the Gog Prophecy is an independent and self-contained entity which differs widely from the rest of the Book of Ezekiel in content, form, mood and literary genre. This Prophecy is not only alien to the style and train of thought of Ezekiel, but also clearly interrupts the sequence and consistent chronological scheme of chs. 1–37 and 40–48. The Prophecy has its setting in a late, post-exilic period and is therefore a later intrusion in the Book of Ezekiel. The purpose of this study is to substantiate this view by focusing on the literary aspects and on the mood and outlook of the Prophecy.

Before approaching this issue, I feel that two limitations should be imposed on this study: one concerns the unity of the Book of Ezekiel, and the other the unity of the Gog Prophecy itself.

### The Unity of the Book

The first two decades of this century witnessed a radical shift in the attitude of biblical scholars toward the unity and authorship of the Book of Ezekiel—from a traditional and strictly conservative approach toward a critical approach. A detailed survey of the diverse critical attitudes toward this Book is beyond the scope of this study.<sup>1</sup> However, in order to clarify and emphasize the main points of my position a few relevant remarks seem to be in order.

In 1880 Smend (pp. XXIf) was so impressed by what he thought to be the homogeneity, consistency, systematic arrangement and logical sequence of the Book, that he concluded the whole Book of Ezekiel might have been written “in einem Zuge”, and that not a single section may be removed without destroying the whole ensemble. This became the dominant view in biblical scholarship and was maintained, *inter alios*, by Driver (1913, p. 279), who posited that “no critical question arises in connection with the authorship of the book, the whole from beginning to end bearing unmistakably the stamp of a single mind.”

This long standing traditional picture of the Book has been radically challenged by later scholars who seriously questioned the unity of the Book, its authorship, and the authenticity of its prophecies. The first

1. For a thorough and lucid survey of this literature, cf. Greenberg (1970, pp. XI–XXIX); Irwin (1943, pp. 3–30; 1965, pp. 139–174).

thoroughgoing, critical attack on the genuineness of the Book of Ezekiel was launched by Hölscher (1924, p. 39) who recognized less than 170 out of a total of 1,273 verses in the entire book as a genuine core which he attributed to the prophet Ezekiel. All the rest (the prose portions and the prophecies of restoration) he attributed to later redactors of the fifth century B.C.E., who incorporated their work into the original Ezekelian poetic oracles of doom, and gave the Book the systematic structure which it now has.<sup>2</sup> This radical shift of attitude among biblical scholars found cogent expression in Torrey's words (1939, p. 78): "It is as though a bomb had been exploded in the Book of Ezekiel, scattering the fragments in all directions. One scholar gathers them up and arranges them in one way, another makes a different combination."<sup>3</sup>

It can be seen, therefore, that with regard to the Book of Ezekiel the pendulum of biblical scholarship has swung from one extreme to the other. Although it is true that the problem of Ezekiel is still a controversial issue today, it seems that except for some shifts of emphasis and a few divergences, biblical scholarship at the present has widely departed from both extreme positions. Current scholarship is fluctuating around a basic conservative approach, which adheres to the substantial accuracy of the traditional view of Ezekiel. True, most recent scholars agree that some portions of the text of the Book are in an extremely bad state, disfigured by corruptions and therefore badly confused; many of the words and phrases are unintelligible; and the text suffers from contradictions, doublets, dislocations, misplacement of passages, glosses and elaborations by later hands. In spite of all these, recent scholars tend to accept the book's own assertions about the time and place of the prophet's proclamations: "The major studies which have appeared since 1950 . . . suggest a more conventional picture, and the present period is witnessing a return to something like the position before 1930" (Stalker, 1968, p. 18). Generally speaking, such is the basic approach of—among others—

2. Twenty years later Irwin (1943) recognized only 251 genuine verses in whole or in part within the first 39 chapters of the Book (chapters 40–48 were ascribed to a later author). Thus Irwin considered more than eighty percent of the Book to be secondary, forming as he thought a later commentary, or even commentary upon commentary (cf. May, 1956, pp. 44–45).

3. Torrey himself greatly contributed to the shattering of the traditional views, when he characterized the Book of Ezekiel as a pseudepigraphon purporting to come from the reign of Manasseh, but in fact composed in the third century B.C.E. and converted by an editor—not many years after the original work had appeared—into a prophecy of the Babylonian Golah (Torrey, 1930 and 1934).

Eichrodt (1970)<sup>4</sup> as well as that of Fohrer (1955), Zimmerli (from 1955 onward),<sup>5</sup> and Howie (1950 and 1962a,b).

Except for the Gog Prophecy this study will, therefore, adhere to the modified traditional view, i.e. that although the Book of Ezekiel does not bear the stamp of a single mind, as Driver posited (1913, p. 279), it does bear at least the spirit and the train of thought of Ezekiel.

### The Unity of the Gog Prophecy

The unity of the Gog Prophecy itself was also challenged by many scholars. The apparent contradictions, obscurities, and incongruities which appear in the Prophecy have led many scholars to assume it to be composite in nature. Bertholet (1936, pp. 130ff) sought to solve these difficulties, and the apparent lack of a logical sequence of thought, by assuming two parallel recensions which had been conflated by an editor and amplified by later hands.<sup>6</sup> Eichrodt (1970, p. 521) failed to find in this prophecy any dramatic unity of conception and he asserted that it is nothing but "a series of individual visions, impossible to combine with one another into an organic picture . . ." The most radical and thorough attack on the unity of this prophecy was launched by Irwin (1943, pp. 172ff), who considered the whole Prophecy to be spurious, conceding authenticity only to the introductory formula and to *ten* additional words, which he considered to be the genuine oracle of Ezekiel. Irwin maintains that the original oracle comprises a single tristich line contained in Ezek 38:1–4a: **הנני אליך גוג ראש משך וחבל ושוכבתיך ואח-כל-חילך** ("Behold I am against you Gog, chief of Meshech and Tubal, and I will turn you back and all your host"). All the rest of the Prophecy he considers to be a late exposition and accretion of expansive interpolations, a

4. Eichrodt's conclusions "are well over toward the position favored by scholars of a generation or two ago that the Book of Ezekiel comes approximately intact from the hands of the prophet Ezekiel, who lived and worked in Babylonia through most of the first quarter of the sixth century B.C." (Irwin, 1965, p. 141).

5. Zimmerli (1969, p. 133) writes: "Whoever reads the book carefully must conclude that the prophet's words have been collected and transmitted within the framework of a circle of disciples, a sort of 'school' of the prophet. The transmission brought more than expansions and explanatory additions."

6. Cf. also Steinmann (1953, pp. 295ff) and Lindblom (1962, pp. 232f). For a detailed discussion on these views and their refutation, see Ahroni (1976a).

“succession of independent comments, pyramided one on another . . .” (1943, p. 172).<sup>7</sup>

However, I strongly believe that in spite of the repetitions, doublets and seemingly interrupted chronological sequence, chs. 38 and 39 of the Book of Ezekiel, known as the Gog Prophecy, should be viewed as a literary work possessing an essential unity and marked by common linguistic features.<sup>8</sup> The entire composition revolves about a tripartite core: GOD — GOG — ISRAEL. The various images in these chapters aim at one purpose: the sanctification of God among the nations. This theme runs like a golden thread through the whole Prophecy integrating its parts into one organic whole. The intricate structural framework of this Prophecy, which is characterized by repetitions and seeming inconsistencies, is due mainly to two factors: (a) the impassioned mood of the poet, envisioning a fantastic panorama;<sup>9</sup> (b) the specific apocalyptic style of the composition, which will be discussed below. Since both of these factors illuminate the central theme from various aspects, no multiple authorship should be assumed. All the parts of this Prophecy are connected in thought and form, and in all their manifold images they are one in essence. However, vss. 25–39 in ch. 39 which ends the Prophecy, seem indeed not to be an integral part of the composition, since they differ from it in language as well as in content (see discussion below).

Assuming that the Gog Prophecy is a unified composition within itself, I will now proceed to examine the relationship between this Prophecy and the rest of the Book of Ezekiel and to substantiate the view that the Prophecy differs in the extreme from the rest of the Book in thought, style and spirit and is, therefore, a later intrusion.

### **The Apparent Unity of Authorship**

One will admit that the Gog Prophecy does include some distinct linguistic features which seemingly bear the stylistic stamp of the Book of Ezekiel:

7. No fair-minded reader can ignore Irwin's substantial contribution to the study of the Book of Ezekiel. However, it seems to me that his criteria for differentiating between the original and the spurious are based on a shaky foundation, as are his rather subjective conclusions.

8. Cf. a detailed discussion of this claim in Ahroni (1976a, pp. 47ff).

9. Cf. Kaufmann (1967, p. 579).

(a) The Prophecy uses the introductory formula which is an Ezekelian stereotyped judgment oracle. This formula runs commonly as follows:

יהי דבר ה' אלי לאמר:  
בן־אדם, שים פניך אל . . .  
והנבא עליו ואמרת: כה אמר ה'

("And the word of the Lord came to me saying:  
Son of man, set your face against . . .  
and prophesy against him and say,  
Thus says the Lord God").<sup>10</sup>

Such a stereotyped formula, especially *ben-'ādām* ("son of man") by which the prophet is addressed, is quite unique and imparts a special stamp to Ezekiel's prophecy.<sup>11</sup> However, although this formula is an indisputable feature of the genuine utterances of Ezekiel, it was, as we shall see, introduced by a later redactor who borrowed external phraseology from the Book of Ezekiel.

(b) The Prophecy four times employs the expression *הרי ישראל* ("mountains of Israel"),<sup>12</sup> which occurs in the Hebrew Scriptures only in the Book of Ezekiel.<sup>13</sup> In the first part of the Book (up to 33:28), this term is connected with prophecies of judgment and doom against the people of Israel, who allegedly profaned the holy mountains of God, turning them into sites of idolatry, cult practices and fertility rites, and erecting on them *במות* ("high places"), *מזבחות* ("altars"), *חמנים* ("incense altars"), *גלולים* ("idols"), etc. (cf. Ezek 6:1–6). Ezekiel, therefore, turns his face against these profaned mountains, threatening by the name of Yahweh to completely desolate them, smashing to pieces the shrines and the idols as

10. Cf. Ezek 6:1–3; 20:2–3; 21:1–3; 25:1–3; 27:1–3; 28:1–2, 11–12, 20–22; 29:1–3; 30:1–2; 31:1–2; 32:1–2, 17–18; 33:1–2; 34:1–2; 35:1–3; 36:1–2; 38:1–3; 39:1–2.

11. Cf. Eichrodt (1970, p. 14). So in Irwin (1943, p. 173): "It has become almost an index of the presence of an utterance by Ezekiel."

12. Ezek 38:8; 39:2, 4, 17.

13. Ezek 6:2, 3; 19:9; 33:28; 34:13, 14; 35:12; 36:1, 4, 8; 37:22. The expression *הרי־ישראל* ("Mount of Israel"), in the singular, occurs only in Josh 11:21, but there it indicates rather a specific and limited portion of the land, whereas in Ezekiel the expression is identical to *אדמת ישראל*, the entire land of Israel (cf. 19:9; 36:4–6). This is probably because the mountains are characteristic of the land of Israel which consists mainly of a central mountain range, and therefore applied metonymically to the whole land. Elsewhere the word *הרי* in the plural, occurs in the construct state with different words, e.g. *הרי העברים* (Num 33:47, 48); *הרי יהודה* (2 Chr 21:11); *הרי שמרון* (Jer 31:4).

well as smiting the wanton and whorish heart of the idolators (6:2–9).<sup>14</sup>

Whereas this expression carries in the main part of Ezekiel the idea of Israel's alienation from God, in chs. 34–39 it is employed in connection with prophecies of hope and restoration, and the mountains of Israel are not looked upon any more with condemning eyes as sites of sin and abominations, but rather with pride and affection. However, in spite of the uniquely characteristic form employed in the Book of Ezekiel, this complaint about the profanation of the mountains of Israel and its catastrophic consequences was voiced by earlier prophets.<sup>15</sup> The conception itself did not originate in Ezekiel but is deeply rooted in biblical prophecy and tradition, especially the tradition of Zion as the mountain of God on which He has taken up His abode.<sup>16</sup> Consequently all enemies assailing the mountains of God will be repelled and exterminated: Isa 14:24–25,

נשבע ה' צבאות לאמר . . .  
לשבר אשור בארצי ועל-הרי אבוסנו

("The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying . . .  
that I will break the Assyrian in my LAND,  
and upon my MOUNTAINS trample him under foot").<sup>17</sup>

(c) The Gog Prophecy employs the expression אבני אלגביש ("hailstones," 38:22), which occurs solely in the Book of Ezekiel (13:11,13). But the whole picture of the cataclysm and the celestial destructive agents of God—pestilence, bloodshed, torrential rains, hailstones, fire and brimstone, etc. (38:22)—seems to draw its colors and inspiration from different portions of scripture, especially those relating to the ten Egyptian plagues (Exodus 7–11), and to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19).<sup>18</sup>

(d) The expression ונתתי חכים בלחיך ("I will put hooks in your jaws," 38:4),<sup>19</sup> used in the Gog Prophecy and addressed against Gog, occurs elsewhere only in Ezek 29:4 where it is addressed against Pharaoh, king

14. Cf. Eichrodt (1970, pp. 93f); Cooke (1936, p. 68).

15. Cf. Hos 4:12; Jer 2:10ff; 3:2, 6, 13; 13:27, etc.

16. See on this subject von Rad (1965, II, pp. 157ff).

17. Cf. also Isa 17:12–14 and Pss 46, 48, 76, etc.

18. Cf. also Isa 29:6; 30:30; Ps 11:6. The mention of בור ("hailstones") as a divine destructive force occurs in several places, e.g., Isa 30:30; Josh 10:11; Job 38:22.

19. The LXX omits this expression.

of Egypt. But again, the whole picture draws its inspiration from mythological sources relating to the capture of the great sea-monster (Taylor, 1969, p. 240). This imagery is vividly reflected in Job 40:25–26.

It is well known in biblical scholarship that affinities in linguistic features are not in themselves any indication of unified authorship; they might easily be the outcome of literary dependence, borrowing and adaptation, a common tradition, etc. As we shall see later, the Gog Prophecy is heavily dependent on a multitude of biblical prophecies, including those of Ezekiel, from which it derived its ideas and motifs, as well as its linguistic features.

### **Arguments for Diverse Authorship**

All the other factors in the Prophecy weigh heavily against its attribution to Ezekiel and clearly indicate its late insertion into the Book. The fact that this Prophecy disrupts the chronological sequence of chs. 1–37 and 40–48 can be clearly seen from the intentional structure of these chapters which possess an essential self-consistency and logical progress of thought. This structure consists of the following:

Chs. 1–24: Prophetic call and commission; denunciations of Israel's transgressions against God and proclamations of judgment against Israel; the downfall of Jerusalem and the dispersion of Israel into Exile.

Chs. 25–37: Oracles of judgment against foreign nations—Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre and Egypt—and proclamation of their imminent doom; promises of salvation and restoration to Israel.

Chs. 40–48: Visions of the fulfillment of the promises of salvation and restoration to Israel; sketch of the constitution of the new Israel and presentation of a religious and cultic program for the future; the restoration of God's temple and the return of **כבוד ה'** ("the glory of God") to his newly-built temple and to the midst of Israel.

This structure gives us an insight into Ezekiel's conception of the process of Israel's redemption. Israel's salvation can be effected not by force of arms, but by direct divine intervention. Since the existence of heathen powers might impede the implementation of God's promises to Israel, these powers and all evil and hostile forces should be eliminated. Therefore with the execution of judgment upon Egypt, the last of the



seven heathen nations enumerated by Ezekiel, the prophet believes that the way for Israel's salvation will be open, and a new era of resurrection and bliss for Israel will dawn: Ezek 29:21, **ביום ההוא אצמיח קרן לבית ישראל**, ("On that day I will cause a horn to spring forth to the house of Israel").

Moreover, Judah and Israel will be unified again under the everlasting guidance of God himself and David, His faithful appointed shepherd (chs. 34 and 37).

This restoration will bring forth the inauguration of a new age of perpetual peace, in which the united tribes of Israel will dwell securely in their land, protected by God Himself, never to be threatened again by hostile activities: Ezek 34:25–28,

וכרתי להם ברית שלום . . . והיו על-אדמתם לבטח . . .  
ולא-יהיו עוד בן לגויים . . . וישבו לבטח ואין מחריד.

("And I will make with them a covenant of peace . . .  
and they shall be secure in their land . . .  
and they shall no more be a prey to the nations . . .  
they shall dwell securely and none shall make them afraid").<sup>20</sup>

The consummation of these promises of restoration is unequivocally confirmed in the Gog Prophecy which depicts the people of Israel as being long-gathered out of many people (38:8), and who are now dwelling securely in their habitation, **ישבי לבטח** (38:11), having no enemies to fear. Totally unexpected therefore is the terrible invasion of Gog and his hordes against the people of Israel. This invasion is the central theme of the Gog Prophecy, and it surprisingly takes place after the restoration.<sup>21</sup>

This basic concept of the future development is not exclusive to Ezekiel but to all the biblical prophecies pertaining to the restoration of Israel: the restoration of Israel will be preceded by a complete overthrow of all hostile forces. From then onward, "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:9). One cannot find in all the pre-exilic nor in the exilic prophecies even the slightest anticipation for the resumption of hostilities after the redemption of Israel.

Moreover, one fails to comprehend the need to reassert God's superiority to the nations after the restoration of Israel. According to the

20. Cf. also 37:24–28.

21. Cf. Cooke (1936, p. 406).

Book of Ezekiel, the salvation of Israel will achieve a grand divine purpose: the sanctification of His name and the magnification of His glory in the midst of His own people, and particularly among the nations. This is an overriding theme in biblical prophecy, reiterated and reemphasized in various places in the Hebrew Bible,<sup>22</sup> and it is characteristic of Ezekiel's prophecy as well.<sup>23</sup> The dominant concept is that the suffering and wretchedness of Israel, not being commensurate with its attribute as "the people of the Lord" (36:20), might be understood by the nations as a sign of God's impotence, and will therefore greatly discredit God's reputation and cause His name to be profaned. This discrepancy between the sanctity of God and the prolonged oppression of His chosen people required divine vindication. Israel's redemption by God is therefore a demonstration of His supreme power and consequently also a restoration of His holy name. By such a demonstration of power, which could only be conceived of as a transcendent act, God's glory will be secured and spread all over the world. Ezekiel, as well as other pertinent prophecies,<sup>24</sup> stress that the deliverance of Israel will not be effected for the sake of the people of Israel themselves (Israel deserves punishment and not deliverance), but for the sake of His name, as a reparation for His profaned dignity: "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name which has been profaned among the nations and which you have profaned among them" (36:22–23).<sup>25</sup> God's purpose is instructive as well as moral: "That they may know that I am the Lord Yahweh" (38:23). That is why all the oracles of Ezekiel against foreign nations end with or include this recognition formula as the main purpose of God's acts of chastisement.<sup>26</sup>

The resumption of hostilities as well as the need for the reassertion of God's superiority after the restoration, which is the overriding concern in the Gog Prophecy, has therefore no logical place in Ezekiel's scheme for the future, is clearly in disharmony with his intention and spirit, and is

22. Exod 7:5; 9:16; Num 14:13–17; Deut 9:28; 32:26–27; Isa 19:21; 41:8; 45:6; 52:5, 10; 55:13; Jer 16:21, etc.

23. Ezek 20:9, 22, 38, 44; 36:20–32, 38; 37:28, etc.

24. Cf. Blank (1967, pp. 117ff), and Morgenstern (1956, pp. 122ff).

25. Cf. also 36:32; 36:36.

26. 25:5, 7, 11, 14, 17; 26:6; 28:24, 26; 29:6, 16, 21; 30:8, 19, 25, 26; 35:4, 9, 12, 15.

alien to the whole picture of the restoration as depicted in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>27</sup>

Some scholars tend to justify the need for the reassertion of God's supremacy and the consequent acts of chastisement by postulating that ch. 37 in Ezekiel ends with the subjugation of those nations which are within the geographical bounds of Israel and which were Israel's historical enemies. Those nations did indeed recognize the absolute supremacy of God, but the nations lying in the outskirts of the land did not hear of God's fame, neither did they see His glory. Therefore, the purpose of Gog's chastisement is to magnify God's name among the most distant barbarian nations: "But let it not be supposed that the conflict is over, and that the victory is finally won; it is a world-wide dominion which this David is destined to wield, and the kingdom of righteousness and peace established at the centre must expand and grow till it embraces the entire circumference of the globe" (Fairbairn, 1960, p. 426).<sup>28</sup>

However, these views are clearly arbitrary conjectures, completely devoid of any authenticating evidence, and founded rather on invalid inferences and *a priori* assumptions. The passage in Isa 66:19–20, on which Davidson bases his assumptions (1900, p. 273), relates to a different context and is not relevant to the problem under discussion.<sup>29</sup> Our basic concern is with the Gog Prophecy within the context of the Book of Ezekiel.

### The Literary Genre of the Gog Prophecy

When scrutinizing the content of the Gog Prophecy itself, one comes across several important factors, which clearly point to the late date of the Prophecy. We shall deal with two of the most prominent ones: (a) verse 38:17, (b) the use of the expression *טבור הארץ* (38:12, "The Navel of the Earth").

Verse 38:17 of the Gog Prophecy is very mysterious but at the same time very instructive. It identifies Gog and his forces with the enemies of

27. Cf. Pfeiffer (1948, pp. 562f); Eichrodt (1970, p. 519).

28. Cf. also Davidson (1900, p. 273); Skinner (n.d., pp. 367ff).

29. This passage is in itself very ambiguous and seems to relate to a period which preceded the restoration of Israel. Cf. especially Isa 66:20: "And they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations . . ."

whom former prophets had prophesied **בַּיָּמִים קְדָמוֹנִים** ("in days of old"). However, in all the literature of the Hebrew Bible there is no mention whatsoever of Gog<sup>30</sup> or the land of Magog,<sup>31</sup> and "our canonical prophets contain nothing that can be specifically taken as pointing to this invasion" (Matthews, 1939, p. 145).

If the reference is to those prophecies that relate to the "Foe from the North" (see below), then this certainly precludes the traditional Ezekiel from being the author of this Prophecy. Jeremiah, to whom many such prophecies are attributed,<sup>32</sup> was Ezekiel's contemporary and cannot be referred to as a "prophet of old." On the other hand Joel (see ch. 2), Micah (see 4:11–13) and Zechariah (see chs. 12 and 14), who also proclaimed utterances of this sort, were post-exilic.<sup>33</sup>

It is noteworthy that some of our most traditional interpreters, including Rashi and Qimhi (Radaq), maintain that this verse refers to Ezekiel and Zechariah. It seems fair to surmise that although there is no direct reference to specific prophets or prophecies, the very reference to the prophetic age as long past does indicate the late date of this prophecy (cf. Cooke, 1936, p. 414).

The Prophecy depicts the people of Israel as **יֹשְׁבֵי עַל-טֹבַח הָאָרֶץ** ("dwelling in *ṭabbûr hā'āreṣ*" 38:12). This expression occurs elsewhere only in Judg 9:37 where it is said: "Behold, there come people down by *ṭabbûr hā'āreṣ*." However, in Judges this expression undoubtedly denotes an elevated ground, as can be inferred from the parallel expression in the preceding verse: **הִנֵּה עַם יוֹרֵד מֵרָאשֵׁי הַהָרִים** ("Behold, there come people down from the top of the mountains"). In the Gog Prophecy this expression has a quite different connotation: the *Navel* of the Earth. Among the chief characteristics which Wensinck (1916, p. XI) ascribes to the navel are: (a) that of being exalted above the territories surrounding it; (b) that of being the origin of the earth as the navel is the origin of the embryo; (c) that of being the center of the earth.<sup>34</sup>

30. The name *Gog* occurs elsewhere only in 1 Chr 5:4, but there it is connected with the genealogy of the sons of Joel, and has nothing to do with the Gog in Ezekiel.

31. The word *Magog* occurs elsewhere only in Gen 10:2 = 1 Chr 1:5 in the genealogy of the sons of Japheth. In the Gog Prophecy Magog is the name of a land "אֶרֶץ הַמָּגוֹג" ("the Land of Magog").

32. Jer 1:13–19; 6:22–23; 13–20; 49:31, etc.

33. It is true that Isaiah also mentions an invasion by a multitude of many people (Isa 17:12–14), but the Gog Prophecy refers to prophets (in the plural) and not to one prophet being a consummation of old prophecies.

34. Cf. also Eliade (1961, pp. 36ff); Cooke (1936, pp. 412f).

The concept of the land of Israel as being **מִכּוּרֵי עוֹלָם** ("the center of the world"), with the characteristics enumerated by Wensinck, is post-exilic and is characteristic of the Pseudepigraphic, Talmudic and Midrashic writings; **מִצִּיּוֹן נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם** (T.B., *Yoma*, 54b, "The world was created from Zion"); "as the navel is situated in the center of a person, so is the land of Israel—in the center of the world" (*Tanḥuma*, Buber, Qedoshim 10, p. 78).<sup>35</sup>

The depiction of the people of Israel as dwelling in the center of the earth, "Ein Volk . . . im mittelpunkt der Erde wohnt" (Caspari, 1933, p. 49), is unique in the whole Bible and is found only in the Gog Prophecy.<sup>36</sup> This fact adds to the accumulation of evidence in favor of the late date of the Prophecy.

Having examined some of the linguistic features and phraseology of this Prophecy, we shall now proceed to examine its style, mood and outlook. When viewing the Prophecy from these aspects, one can easily discern the fundamental difference between the Gog Prophecy and the Book of Ezekiel. The Book of Ezekiel is usually anchored in a historical and realistic background. It refers to well-known historical nations and deals with tangible historical facts. Even the visions recounted, including those pertaining to the future, are marked with clarity and precision. Although Ezekiel's approach in many cases tends to be passionate and hyperbolic, the fundamental background is quite realistic, featuring such particulars as depiction of the profaned temple, political intricacies, precise measurements, detailed rules concerning the ideal cult of the future, minute details concerning various sacrifices, etc.

In contrast to that, the Gog Prophecy embodies the totally unrealistic and imaginative. The elements of exaggeration and fantasy are so dominant that all logic and discipline of consistent thought are markedly absent. The figure of Gog himself, the chief protagonist of this Prophecy, has always been one of the enigmas of biblical prophecy. This subject has occasioned lengthy discussions, a wide variety of opinions and an entire literature, all of which failed to yield any positive identification (Rowley, 1964, p. 33).

35. Cf., e.g., also Jubilees 8:19; T. B. *Sanhedrin* 37a. Ezek 5:5 does not carry, in my opinion, the idea of such centrality.

36. The concept of the centrality of a land or a place is well known from traditions of different nations: The Greeks regarded the Conical Stone, which was situated in the shrine of Delphi, as the center of the world. The Moslems attribute such centrality to Mecca, and the Roman Catholics to Rome.

The Prophecy does not supply us with any clue as to a time setting that can square with the historical events known to us, nor with any data that may correspond to any known historical figure or place. Those who have insisted upon relating this Prophecy to specific historical events have arrived at widely different results, each reading into the verses some of his own thoughts.<sup>37</sup> Even by the wildest stretch of the imagination one cannot read into the text the fantasy of Coder (1963, pp. 87ff): "Without comment I mention the fact that verse 38:9 has caused many students to wonder whether Ezekiel saw aircrafts in his vision, for he said, 'Thou shalt ascend, and come like a storm, thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land' . . ." Coder, like many others, understands *rōš* (38:2, 39:2) as a name of a country and identifies it with Russia. Such a presentation makes delightful reading, but cannot be taken seriously.

### Gog as Personification of the Foe from *šāpôn*

All the details in the Prophecy, especially those in 38:17, indicate that Gog is to be conceived not as a historical figure, but as a personification of the "Foe from *šāpôn*," about whom the prophets had prophesied long before, i.e. as a consummation of old prophecies. The concept of *šāpôn* in biblical literature is far more significant than its geographical meaning. It reflects a blend of several different elements, mainly: (a) A *geographical-historical* element, i.e. a point on the compass. Since most of the catastrophic invasions came upon Israel from the North or North-East, the concept of *šāpôn* in the Israelite mind became associated with the source of national catastrophes in a metaphorical sense, not in the sense of a specific geographical location. (b) A *mythological* element: the mountain of *šāpôn* is mentioned in Ugaritic texts as the dwelling place of Ba'al, and from there this god let loose his poisonous arrows against his enemies.<sup>38</sup> Hence, the concept of *šāpôn* became associated with terror and horror. Moreover, according to other mythological traditions which are found also in Midrashic texts, *šāpôn* is the dwelling-place of רוחות שדים ומידיים ("demonic elements and evil spirits").<sup>39</sup>

37. For detailed discussion of the different theories, see Ahroni (1976b).

38. See Cassuto (1971), tablet V: Fourth section, p. 94; Fifth section, p. 96, etc.

39. *Pirquey Derabbi Eliezer*, ed. D. Luria, Warsaw, 1852, (8:2). Cf. Welch (1951, pp. 97ff), Morgenstern (1941, pp. 1-95).

It may be concluded, therefore, that Gog, who comes from **יִרְכָּחִי צָפֹן** ("the far recesses of the North," 38:15; 39:2), embodies both cosmic destructiveness and demonic powers opposed to God, as well as the historical enemies of Israel who appear in Israelite history in various guises according to changes in the political map. The war described in the Gog Prophecy will be the final and total annihilation of the evil forces, followed by the recognition of Yahweh as the universal God, and of Israel as His chosen people.<sup>40</sup>

### Prophecy and Apocalyptic

From its literary style, as well as from its mood, outlook, and structure, the Gog Prophecy is to be classified with Apocalyptic Literature, and this is in contrast to the rest of the Book of Ezekiel which is prophetic in nature. Although it is sometimes difficult to draw a clear-cut distinction between Prophecy and Apocalypticism (since there are passages, especially in later prophecy, marked with apocalyptic features), it is generally agreed that Apocalyptic differs from Prophecy in its styles, pattern and fundamental outlook.

Prophecy is primarily concerned with human life in its historical setting and the anticipations of the prophets are conditioned by contemporary political situations. The prophets regarded the great world empires as God's **שֵׁבֶט אֶף וּמִטָּה זַעַם** ("the rod of God's anger and staff of His fury", Isa 10:5), i.e. the instruments of God to inflict judgment upon His sinful people. This was Isaiah's approach toward Assyria and Jeremiah's toward Babylonia.

On the other hand, Apocalyptic Literature is deterministic and pessimistic in its attitude toward history. Deliverance of the people of Israel will never emerge as an outcome of normal political maneuvers or as a development of existing historical conditions, but through direct intervention of God, resulting in the annihilation of all evil forces. This will be followed by the inauguration of a new world in which God's kingdom will be established on earth, and the paradisiac relations of unity and harmony between man and nature, and between both of these and God will be eternally restored.<sup>41</sup> Israel's only hope, according to Apocalyptic, lies

40. Cf. the discussion about the possible derivation of the name Gog in Ahroni (1976b).

41. Cf. Rowley (1964, pp. 35ff); Rist (1962).

outside the course of history: "Speaking generally, the prophets foretold the future that should rise out of the present, while the apocalyptists foretold the future that should break into the present" (Rowley, 1964, p. 35).

Whereas the setting of Prophecy is generally local, that of Apocalypticism is cosmic and of universal significance. God's theophany will be accompanied by terrestrial disasters and cosmic disturbances: "Stark terror is the apocalyptic mood, but it yields in the end to peace. Worlds crash and splinter. The wobbling earth grows dizzy, overturns and spills its load of corruption...in the calm that ensues they are there—the blessed" (Blank, 1969, p. 114). Moreover, Prophecy is normally marked by straightforward utterances, whereas the apocalyptic utterance is usually vague, cryptic, and uses bizzare imagery.<sup>42</sup>

The Gog Prophecy falls within the literary domain of Apocalyptic. The central theme is the final conflict between God and Gog, the embodiment of cosmic evil forces. Gog with his multitudes and gigantic forces swoops down on the restored people of Israel כענן לכסות הארץ (38:9, 16, "like a cloud covering the land"), motivated by wanton lust for spoil, and stimulated by the prospect of easy victory.

That this prophecy should not be understood in its literal sense can be discerned from the list of nations which Gog musters against Israel, especially Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, Togamah, Ethiopia and Lybia (38:2, 5–6). None of these nations are contiguous to Israel and were never historical enemies.<sup>43</sup> The fantastic and the impossible permeate the whole prophecy. It is inconceivable that such multitudes of people would ascend from the distant quarters of the North, combine and act together for one sole purpose, "to spoil and plunder a land which could not, had they got all it contained, have been a handful to a tithe of their number—could not have served to maintain the invaders for a single day" (Fairbairn, 1960, p. 422). A hint as to the size of these invading forces may be inferred from the report that it took Israel more than seven months to bury the carcasses of this enemy (39:12–15). Moreover, it is inconceivable that Gog would muster such an enormous amount of weapons, which according to the Prophecy served the Israelites as fuel for *seven* years (39:9), for the purpose of attacking a small nation living a peaceful and pastoral life (38:11–12). This picture clearly contradicts the

42. Cf. Sandmel (1968, pp. 218, 228).

43. Cf. Ahroni (1976b).



walled and fortified cities which Ezekiel envisions for the future (36:35).

The Prophecy is replete with obscurities and symbolic language, and exhibits an enigmatic and esoteric character. The number seven, which conventionally plays a mysterious role in Apocalyptic writings, is prominent in this Prophecy: seven months (39:12), seven years (39:9), a catalog of seven kinds of weapons (39:9),<sup>44</sup> and seven sections of the composition.

Most of the names and geographic places mentioned in the Prophecy cannot be identified with certainty. Jerusalem is not mentioned, and we don't have the slightest notion about the scene of the battles, except for the general reference to the "mountains of Israel" (39:4). Nothing specific is said about the constitution of the people of Israel, their form of government, their leaders, etc. The sites of places like *gē hā'ōḇārīm* (39:11),<sup>45</sup> which was designated for the burial of Gog's multitudes, as well as that of the names *hāmōn-gōg* (39:11), the city of *hāmōnā* (39:16) do not occur elsewhere, and none can be identified with certainty.<sup>46</sup>

The tendency to depict a dramatic conflict between concepts which are diametrically opposed to each other is another salient feature of this Prophecy. Gog is the embodiment of satanic and diabolical powers, and Israel is the personification of peace, ideal tranquility and serenity. This contrast may be compared to the war of the sons of darkness against the sons of light. The "four corners of the earth"<sup>47</sup> are mustered against the land of Israel which is described as the navel of the earth. This contrast is a well-known post-biblical motif; a lamb among seventy wolves. The list of the nations who join Gog against Israel is undoubtedly fictitious, being a mere compilation of the names taken from the several catalogues already familiar elsewhere in the Bible.<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, the Gog Prophecy is spun with threads of motifs already

44. The number seven carries the idea of sacredness and completeness, cf. Matthews (1939, p. 147); Redpath (1907, p. 211).

45. Some of the different opinions: Hengstenberg (1869, p. 342) translates "the valley of the passengers," and identifies it with the Valley of Megiddo; Redpath (1907, p. 210) reads "the valley of Abarim" (disregarding the massoretic pointing), and associates it with the district of Mount Abarim (Num 27:12; 33:47; Deut 32:49); also see May (1956, p. 280), who translates "the Valley of the Travellers" and maintains that it is "an allusion to a valley in the mountains of Abarim which included Mount Nebo . . ."; Matthews (1939, p. 146) suggests that since no valley of that name is known, "probably it was intended in a mythological rather than in a geographical sense."

46. "The names of various places, which at first sight impress us as being historically accurate, cannot fully be elucidated" (Eichrodt, 1970, p. 519).

47. Cf. also Rev. 20:7-9.

48. Ezek 27:10-14; 30:5; Jer 46:9-10; Gen 10:2-7; 1 Chr 1:4.

familiar from other contexts, "spoken in olden times by God's servants, the prophets of Israel." We have before us, therefore, no more than a mosaic of motifs chief among which are the following: "for the sake of His name";<sup>49</sup> earthquake and celestial calamities;<sup>50</sup> יושב לבטח ("dwelling in security");<sup>51</sup> the Land of Israel besieged but miraculously saved;<sup>52</sup> God's sacrificial feast;<sup>53</sup> internal discord and internecine slaughter;<sup>54</sup> and the motif of the "The Foe from *šāpôn*" discussed above. The author of this Prophecy, therefore, is not propounding essentially new ideas, but merely piling well-known biblical motifs together and lifting them to a new climax (cf. Kaufmann, 1967, p. 581). There is no need therefore to go as far as the "Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin" in search of the author's source of inspiration and "basic conception," as Astour has done (1976, pp. 572ff).

### The Historical Setting of the Gog Prophecy

The concept of the resumption of hostilities after the restoration is clearly inconsistent with a pre-exilic dating and precludes even an exilic setting. The pre-exilic and the exilic prophets looked at the future redemption of Israel as an imminent event which would be effected in the near future. According to Jeremiah (29:10 and 25:11–13) God's promises of glory and majesty to Israel would be fulfilled, "when seventy years are completed for Babylon," and Deutero-Isaiah referred to Cyrus as רועי ("My shepherd") and משיחו ("His anointed"), commissioned by the Lord to bring salvation to the people of Israel and to effect their restoration (Isa 44:28; 45:1–4).

The promises of restoration pronounced by the prophets reach their climax in Deutero-Isaiah where they are formulated in the most extravagant terms: a radiant, golden age will accompany Israel's restoration, and the glory of the Lord will shine upon Israel who will be "a crown of beauty" and "a royal diadem" in the hand of God (Isa 62:3).

49. See discussion above.

50. Gen 19:24; Exod 19:16–18; Jer 4:23ff; Isa 29:6; 30:30; 66:16; Ezek 28:23; 5:17; Ps 11:6; 18:15, etc.

51. Judg 18:7; Jer 49:31–32; Zeph 3:13; Zech 2:8; 14:11; Isa 60:18; 49:16; Ezek 34:27–28.

52. Zech 12:2–9; 14:12f; Isa 29:5–8; 31:5; 2 Kgs 19:35; Joel 4:2.

53. Isa 25:6–7; 34:2–8; 56:9; Ezek 32:4–5; 29:3–5. Cf. also 2 Kgs 10:19; Jer 12:9; Rev 19:17–18.

54. Judg 7:22; 1 Sam 14:20; Hag 2:22; Zech 14:13. Cf. also Enoch 66:7; 100:1.

Kings and kingdoms will minister to the people of Israel, and relations of love and mutual affection will prevail between God and Israel: Isa 62:5, ומשׁושׁ חתן על כלה ישיש עליך אלהיך ("And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you"). Jerusalem will be reestablished, and violence will be heard no more in the land of Israel (Isa 60:18).

The dispirited and dejected people of Israel looked confidently forward to the speedy realization of these promises of joy which had been affirmed by all the pre-exilic and exilic prophets. Unfortunately, the partial restoration following the edict of Cyrus (Ezra 1:2–4), which at the beginning thrilled the hearts of the people of Israel and raised their hopes, was very frustrating. Not only were the glowing pictures of the prophets not realized, but misery and distress were the lot of those who returned from captivity. They were overcome by the repeated failure of their crops—a calamity which finds its most picturesque expression in the words of Haggai (1:6): והמשתכר משתכר אל-צרור נקוב ("And he who earns wages earns wages to put them into a bag with holes"). Zechariah (8:10) depicts the deep distress of the returning Israelites, who were bereft of elementary peace and security in the following words: וליצא ולבא אין-שלום ("neither was there any safety from the foe for him who went out or came in").

These faded hopes were revived by Haggai and Zechariah, who managed to rekindle the fire of faith in the hearts of their dejected people, and to reestablish the confidence in God. They attributed all the misfortunes that befell their people to the people's neglecting to build the Temple of God (Hag 1:3–11). They promised that God was withholding the realization of His promises for a short time only, and that with the rebuilding of His Temple a new era of prosperity would dawn (Hag 2:6–9, 20–23; Zech 8:9–15).

But Haggai and Zechariah's messianic expectations were directed to the immediate future. They were focused on Zerubbabel and linked with him. They believed that in the figure of this scion of David, God's promises of restoration would be consummated. Zerubbabel was proclaimed as the servant of Yahweh, His "signet-ring" and chosen one (Hag 2:23; Zech 4:6–10). He was for them "a living reminder of a glorious past and a pledge for an equally brilliant future as foretold by the prophets" (Graetz, 1939, p. 360).

Unfortunately, all the hopes centered on Zerubbabel came to naught. Nothing is recorded in the biblical sources about the circumstances of

Zerubbabel's sudden disappearance from history, and this mystery is subject to various speculations.<sup>55</sup> One can imagine the frustration that came upon the people returning from captivity. They came to realize that the overthrow of empires did not in itself effect their salvation, as had been anticipated by the prophets.

The recurring disappointments that resulted from the anticipation of the dawn of the glorious age, *בחייתך וביומייך* ("in your lifetime and in your days"), endangered not only the faith and confidence of the people in God and in themselves, but also their very survival as a nation. There was a crucial need for a new word of power and inspiration that could keep alive the flame of hope in such difficult days. The challenge was met by the doctrine that shifted the emergence of the messianic times to the indefinite future, to the end of days. The ideal age was thus divorced from any reference to a definite person or to a definite historical situation. The ultimate theophany of God would be of cosmic and universal significance, accompanied by terrestrial and celestial disasters. These transcendental manifestations would cause the whole world to recognize God's majesty and universal supremacy, and thus God's name would be magnified and sanctified by all.

Thus the eschatological hopes were now a living source of strength, fortifying the people in days of despondency and dire need. The anticipations regarding the realization of the promises proclaimed by the prophets (including Haggai and Zechariah) were not diminished but strengthened. Although there was no longer a commitment to a definite date, there was a strong belief that the dawn of the golden age was sure to come, "but if it tarries wait for it."<sup>56</sup>

It seems to me that the Gog Prophecy is much more intelligible when it is read within the context of these religious developments and historical setting; namely, read as a product of a post-exilic period later than that of Haggai and Zechariah. The author of this Prophecy looked upon the return of the people of Israel from captivity as a part of a long process (38:8). The restoration itself has been effected, but the golden age in which God's name would be magnified and sanctified among the nations was yet to come.

However, the anticipation of the author of the Gog Prophecy was not for a revelation of God in his own time, but in an indefinite es-

55. Cf. Dahlberg (1962, pp. 955f); Graetz (1939, pp. 360f).

56. Hab 2:3 quoted by Rabbi Nahman (*Sanhedrin*, 97b).

chatological period. This notion is reiterated in this Prophecy by the employment of eschatological formulas such as *בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים* ("in latter days," 38:16) and *בְּאַחֲרִית הַשָּׁנִים* ("in latter years," 38:8), stressed by the recurring expression *בְּיוֹם הַהוּא* ("on that day," 38:10, 14, 18; 39:11). These eschatological formulas, which do not occur elsewhere in the Book of Ezekiel, denote the messianic epoch as the time for the invasion of Israel by Gog and his hordes and for the inauguration of the new era. The vision of divine activity is thus shifted from the political-historical realm to the cosmic level.

Having, I hope, shown that the Gog Prophecy stems from the post-exilic period, one would be tempted to venture at narrowing the circle, and to be more specific with regard to the historical setting of this Prophecy. Unfortunately, this is an impossible task. As we have stated above, the Prophecy does not supply us with sufficient data that can enable us to assign it with any certainty to a specific historical event or period. On the other hand, the history of the Israelite post-exilic period, down to the late fifth century B.C.E., suffers from gaps. No historical records were preserved with regard to the period between about 516 B.C.E. (the building of the Temple) and 458 B.C.E. (Ezra's coming to Jerusalem). Moreover, our records concerning some portions of Israel's history down to the Maccabean period are vague and confused. These gaps have always been a source for conjectures and speculations as to historical events. Morgenstern (1956, p. 101ff),<sup>57</sup> e.g., contends that a second catastrophic event "at least as cataclysmic as that of 586 B.C.E." befell Jerusalem in the year 485 B.C.E., resulting in a second destruction and depopulation of Jerusalem. He claims that this ruthless destruction was wrought by a coalition of nations immediately adjacent to Judea, i.e., the Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines, and Tyrians. Buttenwieser (1938), on the other hand, relates Pss 74 and 79 with a national disaster, "a catastrophe of the first magnitude" (p. 555) that had allegedly transpired in 344 B.C.E., and in which Artaxerxes III Ochus, or rather his general Orophernes, carried away a large portion of the Jewish population into captivity and resettled them in Hyrcania.<sup>58</sup>

While our references to these and other claimed events are uncertain and there is no conclusive proof for any of them, the conjectures serve to

57. Cf. also Morgenstern (1957 and 1960).

58. This incident was recorded by Eusebius, *Chronicon II* (ed. Schöne), pp. 112–113, and by others.

illustrate the great difficulties or even the impossibility of trying to assign this Prophecy to a specific historical setting.

However, there is an illuminating factor in this Prophecy which merits our attention. As opposed to analogous scenes in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Gog Prophecy spells total destruction for the enemies of Israel. God's destructive judgment effects not only the invaders themselves but also their lands: Ezek 39:6, ושלחתי אש במגוג וביושבי האיים, לבטח ("And I will send a fire on Magog and on those who dwell securely in the isles"). As can be easily inferred from the other occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, the word for "isles" in this Prophecy denotes not necessarily "islands" in the narrow sense of the word but rather states and countries in general.<sup>59</sup> The total annihilation will, therefore, effect not only the land of Magog, but also the four corners of the then-known earth: Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, Beth-Togarmah, Persia, Cush, Put, and most probably also Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish, who anticipate acquiring the great spoil which Gog will plunder from the land of Israel (38:13).

This depiction of a total annihilation of the enemy (the invaders and their lands) actually introduces a unique idea into biblical prophecy and contradicts the very declared aim of the Gog Prophecy, i.e., the vindication of God's holiness among the nations. But how could this objective be achieved if all the nations are doomed to total destruction? To quote Ps 30:10, "What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise thee? Will it tell of thy faithfulness?"

It is true that in various portions of the Hebrew Scriptures we do find a plea for vengeance to be wreaked upon Israel's enemies, and even a cry addressed to God that He would requite sevenfold to those who spilled the blood of Israel (cf., e.g., Pss 79 and 137). However, the pleas never aim at the *total* extermination of the enemies. The ultimate purpose is "that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve Him with one accord" (Zeph 3:9). Moreover, the Hebrew Scriptures envision a prominent role for the heathen nations (including the historical enemies of Israel) in the divine scheme for the impending redemption of Israel. They would be granted an option to join Israel and cleave to them (Isa 14:1–2), and those who would do so would be built up in the midst of God's people (Jer 12:16). "Turn to me and be saved," was the call of Deutero-Isaiah (45:22).<sup>60</sup>

59. Cf., e.g., Isa 41:1, 5; 42:4; 49:1; 60:9; 66:19; Ezek 26:15; 27:35; Ps 97:1; Zeph 2:11. See Avi-Yonah (1965, p. 239).

60. Cf. also Isa 42:6; 44:5; 45:14; 49:2, 6; 55:4–5; 66:23; Zech 2:15; 6:15; 8:20ff; 14:16.

The horrors of the total devastation depicted in the Gog Prophecy are further intensified by the concentrated bloody images of carnage, especially that of the divine sacrificial banquet. According to the Prophecy, God summons all the birds-of-prey and all the ravenous beasts of the field to take part in His sacrificial feast where they shall devour the flesh and drink the blood of the invaders: "And you shall eat fat till you are filled, and drink blood till you are drunk, at the sacrificial feast which I am preparing for you. And you shall be filled at my table with horses and riders, with mighty men and all kinds of warriors" (39:19–20).

To be sure, most, if not all of the agents of destruction and terror mentioned in this Prophecy, as well as the images of carnage and death, are already familiar to us from other contexts of the Hebrew Bible. What is unique in this Prophecy, however, is the schematic accumulation and the magnification of all the images of horror in one gruesome scene. The graphic presentation of birds-of-prey and wild animals gorging themselves on fat and blood, which in a sacrifice proper are not to be consumed, but offered to God (Ezek 44:15),<sup>61</sup> makes for a revolting picture (cf. Wevers, 1969, p. 294).

It should be noted, however, that the apparent jubilant tone at the sight of the enemy's devastation, which seems to be dominant in this Prophecy, betrays deep emotions of anger and distress on the part of the author. Evidently, the author is enveloped with bitterness and cherishes an implacable hatred towards the heathen world, which causes the history of Israel to be a history of successive woes. The scenes of carnage wrought by the enemies of Israel are well marked throughout the biblical as well as post-biblical literature: the blood of the people of Israel was occasionally shed like water; their children were dashed in pieces before their eyes;<sup>62</sup> their women ripped up and ravished (Lam 5:11ff);<sup>63</sup> their tears streamed like a torrent day and night (Lam 2:18); their land had been constantly overrun and devastated, its cities laid in ruins and portions of its people sold as slaves. The corpses were left unburied to be consumed by birds-of-prey and ravenous beasts (Ps 79).

The bitterness due to the constant afflictions and tribulations of Israel seems to reach its climax in the Gog Prophecy in a plea for un-

61. The fat should be offered to God (Lev 3:16; 7:23–25); the blood was usually sprinkled against the altar round about (Lev 3:13; 5:9; 16:19), poured out (Exod 29:12; Lev 4:7), or burned (Num 19:5).

62. Cf. 2 Kgs 8:12; Isa 13:16; Ps 137:8–9.

63. Cf. also Hos 10:14; Nah 3:10.

precedented vengeance. That those bitter emotions, however, are not a reaction to a single and specific national disaster can be attested to by the fact that the author employs such a vague and obscure formulation which renders it impossible to associate his work with a definite historical event. The bitterness is, rather, a culmination of all the catastrophic events that had befallen Israel from its beginnings till the time of the writer. In this respect the Prophecy is consistent in its attitude and method of bringing well-known motifs and prophecies to their consummation and culmination.

In view of these considerations, it seems to me that any endeavor to attribute the Gog Prophecy to a specific historical event would prove futile and is even unnecessary. Any distress or traumatic experience in post-exilic times, be it national or local, could easily release such an outpour of bitter human passions. This is a well-known psychological phenomenon that can be illustrated by reference to the contemporary literature: a single pogrom in Kishinev (1903) stirred up the soul of Bialik, the national poet of modern Israel, to such a degree that in his poem "On the Slaughter," latent emotions from thousands of years of affliction and persecution gushed forth, culminating in a plea for the destruction of the whole world.

The Gog Prophecy, being a product of post-exilic times, is a late interpolation into the Book of Ezekiel. It is apparent that the original Gog Apocalypse ended with 39:24, and it is widely recognized<sup>64</sup> that the passage of 39:25–29, which ends this Prophecy, is a postscript, added to the original composition as a literary artifice to form a link between ch. 37 and ch. 40 of the Book of Ezekiel. This assumption finds its corroboration in the fact that this ending passage has no relation, either in content or in form, to the preceding themes of the Prophecy. The basic difference is in their historical outlook; whereas the Gog Prophecy looks at the restoration as an accomplished event, this passage looks forward to its imminent realization: "Therefore thus says the Lord God; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel . . ." (39:25). The passage is, therefore, no more than a mere recapitulation of restoration oracles. The significance of the Gog Prophecy does not lie in the domain of historical authenticity, but in its unique mood and outlook.

64. Cf. Wevers (1969, pp. 284ff), Eichrodt (1970, p. 521), Irwin (1943, p. 179), etc.



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